



Bulletin #2517, Maine Maple Tours: Guidance During COVID-19

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Information for COVID-19

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Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the Maine Maple Producers Association was forced to cancel the 2020 Maine Maple Sunday for the safety of the producers and their customers. This caused a major loss in sales for many maple producers throughout the state. To make up for those sales, and to provide an educational and entertaining event for the public, the Maine Maple Producers Association, in collaboration with other states throughout the maple producing region, is planning the *Fall North American Maple Tour*.



Maple Based Events face a unique problem for safe sales during the COVID-19 outbreak. Typically, these events can tend to draw a large number of customers to the sugarhouse in a short period. Historically, those customers spend a significant amount of time on-farm for events like sugarhouse tours, pancake breakfasts, syrup tastings, and

more. This year, new systems need to be developed and implemented to meet the Maine CDC's [COVID-19 guidance](#). These systems will keep sugaring families, staff, and customers safe at these events during this COVID-19 outbreak.

New protocols for sanitization, customer flow, and payment methods must be planned. Ultimately, the goal is to:

- maximize space between people (greater than 6 feet),
- minimize touchpoints, and
- implement systems to clean and disinfect areas of frequent contact.

Those plans then need to be clearly communicated to your customers. Below are recommendations for communicating with your customers.

Communication and Marketing to the Public (Pre-Arrival)

- Update your website and social media with clear communication about what customers can expect when at this event (see [Social Media Best Practices in Times of Crisis from Penn State](#)).
- Be positive in that communication.
- Show the community that you are using recommended practices for sanitation and distancing (e.g. avoid posting pictures from last year's event that show a sugarhouse packed with people, or other images of crowds).
- Require customers to bring and wear a face-covering.
- Instruct customers to stay home if they are feeling ill.

Consider sharing the [CDC Coronavirus Symptoms Checker](#)

- Clarify your hours, if you are taking orders for pre-packed products on-line or over the phone, and anything else critical to the success of your system. Pre-packing products for customers can greatly decrease the amount of time that people are on the farm at one time.
 - Specify special payment methods if applicable. (e.g. check and cards only.)
 - Remember that most customers will be reassured by seeing that you are putting systems in place to keep them safe.

Determining the Safety of Entertainment Options (Pre-Planning)

When considering entertainment options to draw in customers, you will need to consider the level of risk inherent with that activity. Will it reduce customer flow and create crowded conditions? Will it involve people being inside, or needing to touch surfaces that several others are also touching? It will be up to you to evaluate whether you can create systems to minimize those risks, or whether it is safer to forgo certain activities this year.

- When you have selected potential activities, consider the Center for Disease Control's Hierarchy of Control in relation to the activity. This system guides you through evaluating if there are alternatives or adjustments to make the option less likely to spread the disease. For example, as opposed to letting families walk through the sugarhouse, rope off the opened door and let them look in, or move a small evaporator outdoors for boiling demonstrations.
- Consider a few contingency plans for likely possible scenarios. (If it rains, what will you do? If you get a rush of visitors, how will you handle the crowds?)
- To minimize your risk, you may choose to only offer maple products for grab-and-go sales.

Serving Food and Offering Samples

Serving food (such as breakfasts) on-site should be avoided. If you decide to offer on-site food, keep in mind the following:

- **If serving food**, you must follow the State of Maine's Phase 2 Reopening Plan for Restaurants and follow the restaurant checklist, including:
 - For contact tracing purposes, maintain records of customers, including one customer name and contact information per party and the server of the table, for at least 21 days.
 - Limit group party size to 8 diners per seated group.
 - The total number of people at any one time should be no more than 50 people per room, and each party must be 6 feet apart from other parties. This also applies to outdoor seating areas. Have a back-up plan for outdoor seating that adheres to physical distance requirements in case of inclement weather.
 - Guests may remove their facemasks only when seated.
- **Samples** may only be offered if participants are seated.
 - Buffet or self-serve style service without sneeze guards is not allowed.
 - Have a staff member trained to safely and regularly sanitize all tables or high-touch surfaces.

Parking and Welcome Area Layout (Day of)

- Put up barriers and signage posting your policies between your parking area and welcoming booth, plus barriers to keep the traffic flowing in one direction, minimizing person-to-person contact.
- Place the check-in far from the check-out area to prevent crossing traffic.
- Put markers every 6' on the ground, or along the barriers to designate space between customers, in case a line forms.

- Under current guidance for retail businesses, retailers must limit the total occupancy of stores to 5 customers per 1,000 square feet of shopping space. (You might consider being more conservative with that number depending on conditions.)
- Provide a handwashing station at the entrance and at a few locations around the sugarhouse.
 Use these designs for building a low cost (\$20) handwashing station. If that is not possible, provide hand sanitizer. Customers should be instructed to wash/sanitize hands before entering that space, and before consuming any food products.
- Identify surfaces that visitors are likely to touch frequently (tent posts, baskets, bench edges, etc) and clean and sanitize (if possible) on a set schedule using an approved sanitizer. Bathroom facilities should be sanitized on a regular and frequent schedule.
- Be sure to train your staff on these sanitization procedures.

Crowd Control Options

- The current (8/1/20) State of Maine mandate on outdoor gatherings states, “The limit on the number of persons for outdoor gatherings is 5 people per 1,000 sq. ft of occupiable outdoor space, or not more than 100 persons, whichever is less (i.e. in order to host the maximum number of 100 guests, there must be 20,000 square feet of occupiable outdoor space).
- The limits on the number of persons for *indoor* gatherings remain at 50 persons.
- Make a plan for how you will limit the number of customers allowed into each of your spaces at one time. (Customers may have to wait in their vehicles until other customers leave.)
- Train staff to uphold these rules and create a plan for positively responding to potential customer interactions resulting from requests to wait in line or to wear a mask.
- Encourage a flow where customers are welcomed in one location, enter the sales area on one side, then exit the area on the other side, and pay separately. This will minimize interactions between customers who are entering and those who are exiting.
- Have products for sale near the parking area. This way customers who just want to buy products can avoid the more congested areas.
- Offer pre-orders by phone, e-mail, or online purchasing platform. Pre-pack those orders and have them ready for the customer to grab-and-go.

Checkout Options

- Have someone designated to handle money. Staff handling money and interacting with clients should wash their hands frequently, wear gloves, and a face covering.

- Keep the check-out area separate from the welcome area to minimize crowding.
- Encourage contactless payment options.
- Consider these checkout options:
 - **Drive-thru style checkouts.** Staff can load products into the trunk of customers' cars. Payment can be made through the car window.
 - **Plexiglass protected checkout.** Install plexiglass between staff and customers. Sanitize the card reader often, on a set schedule, preferably after every transaction.
 - **Online payment.** By setting up an online shopping and payment system, you can minimize these concerns. This does increase staffing needs to pull and prepare orders.

Liability and Due Diligence

- Be sure to check in with your insurance company to make sure that the activities that you have selected will be covered by your policy.
- Be sure to post the Maine Agritourism Liability sign prominently. Members can purchase these through the Maine Maple Producers Association for a discounted price, or from other vendors.
- During any season, be sure to do a safety walk-through before opening to the public to address tripping hazards, chemical storage, electrocution hazards, keys removed from the equipment and implements down, etc.

Other resources:

- [Agritourism Safety Checklist](#)
- [Managing the Safety Risks of Agritourism Farms](#)

Face coverings:

- Face coverings must be worn in public settings except for a child under the age of 2.
- All employees must wear face coverings.
- Face coverings include:
 - Cloth face masks that cover the mouth and nose, are made of multiple layers of fabric, fits snugly against the face, don't restrict breathing, and can be laundered without damage or change to its shape.
 - Disposable face masks of similar quality.
 - For customers who state that they have a medical condition preventing them from wearing a face cloth, they may wear a face shield or other reasonable accommodations can be made, such as their order being brought to them at curbside.

Final Thoughts

While there is great potential for this event, all participating producers must take the risk involved seriously. Many producers may choose to minimize this risk by only offering maple products for grab-and-go sales only. Others may choose more involved entertainment options but must do so with careful planning. Developing those plans to maximize space between people (greater than 6 feet), to minimize touchpoints, and with systems to sanitize areas of frequent contact will ensure everyone's safety and a successful event.

If you have questions about your event planning process, do not hesitate to reach out to Jason Lilley at University of Maine Cooperative Extension for support at jason.lilley@maine.edu or 207.781.6099, or the [Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry \(DACF\)](#) 207.287.3491.



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